

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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Editorial

Important Questions

Under this heading, Elder D. L. Miller, editor-in-chief of the Gospel Messenger, the most traveled, the most influential, and perhaps the ablest man in the German Baptist church, makes certain statements concerning the Progressive Brethren, to which we call attention. The main object which he had in view in writing the article in question is made clear in the opening paragraph, as follows:

I am in receipt of letters from some of our young brethren who have enjoyed the advantages of higher education, and who stand second to none in ability and in educational training, asking why our city missions are not more successful, and why more of our better educated brethren are not seeking to enter the mission fields of the church. Some suggest that the form of dress adopted by the church is a great hindrance to the progress of the work both in the country and in the cities. I have a desire to reason with those who write thus, and also with others who are like-minded.

To this we will add by way of further explanation, that, as the leaders of the German Baptists know, and as our people know, of late there has developed a decided tendency among educated and intelligent German Baptists to transfer their membership to the Brethren church. There are signs that this tendency is on the increase. There are most evident signs that a deep ferment is working in the minds of educated young G. B.'s on the subject of the "order", and it is perfectly natural that Brother Miller should be early warned of the danger, and should seek to stem the tide which is beginning to set in our direction. Now the following paragraph quoted at length from his editorial article will show all this, and will further show to what lengths even a man like Elder Miller is willing to go to ward off the threatened defection of his members, and satisfy the educated mind that the "order" is a good thing, at least for the sisters. Brethren, read the following paragraph carefully, and see yourselves as others, some others, see you:

History records one attempt to bring the church to a greater degree of popularity and success, and it has been written down as a failure. The leaders of that movement have long since learned, to the sorrow of their hearts, that it is much easier to cut the Gordian knot than to untie it, and that when the barriers are burned away worldliness rushes into the church with a force and power that nothing can withstand. I search in vain to-day for a semblance of gospel plainness, or Primitive Christianity, and yet it is but a score of years since they made the solemn declaration, calling God to witness, that they were going to maintain all gospel principles even down to plain dressing, only they would have no "order" or "Annual Meeting" in theirs. Now they have fashionable dressing, secret societies of every shade and order, church festivals, and about everything the most worldly minded man or woman could desire. To them plain dressing is a myth, the prayer covering has gone where the woodbine twineth, the holy kiss is obsolete, feet-washing is observed in a corner, the Lord's supper is rapidly assuming the Methodist idea, a morsel of bread and a cup of cold water, and they

have lost the distinctive features of the church of Jesus Christ. They have sacrificed principle for popularity and have not found what they sought. One of their prominent leaders said not long ago, "God knows I never wanted or favored the innovations that have been forced into the church, but I was powerless to hinder them."

Now we can certainly afford to discuss these strictures in the best possible temper. But what shall we say about them? Our Brethren know, and we are almost compelled to believe that Elder Miller knows, that there is not a single allegation in that paragraph that is true of us as a church except it be that one touching what our German Baptist Brethren are pleased to call the "prayer covering", a thing so remote from the veil of which Paul writes to the Corinthians that the apostle himself would fail to recognize it as a covering at all. The Progressive movement did not have popularity for its object; it is not "written down as a failure", except by its enemies who wish it to fail, and whose testimony therefore is not reliable; the leaders are not burdened with "sorrow in their hearts" about the "Gordian knot" which they cut; there have been no "barriers burned away" except the barrier of order rags, and Annual Meeting Minutes, which being made tests of church fellowship were thereby ordained conditions of salvation; there has been no "rush of worldliness into the church with a power that nothing can withstand". If his search for Primitive Christianity among us has failed, it is because, (1) he did not search for it; or (2) because he did not want to find it; or (3) because he wouldn't know it when he saw it. We say it, not boastingly but humbly as a statement of a fact, that our members are as godly and as consecrated as his. We do not say that they are the saints they ought to be, but they will in all respects, excepting the "order", compare with his, and about all the difference in regard to the order concerns the sisters, for the G. B. young men dress as ours do.

If the "order" as applied to sisters is the sole mark of Primitive Christianity, or any mark of Primitive Christianity at all, then and in that case we admit that so far as our sisters are concerned we shine with an inferior light. But that our members practice "about everything the most worldly-minded man or woman could desire" is not true, and we have no idea that Brother Miller really believes it to be true. He is too intelligent, and too well informed, and we might add, too honest, to write and publish what he has concerning us, unless spurred thereto by a pressing and to him most painful necessity, to quiet a most dangerous ferment in the minds of his educated young members concerning the orthodoxy of the "order", and the authority of Annual Meeting Minutes in general.

Now the questions of worldliness, and church popularity, and church success, are as vital to us as to any other communion. There is too much worldliness in all churches, ours